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Oral History Interview: Lynn Ernest

Lynn Ernest

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Black Gold Company Surface Mine Hearing, Inc., September 28, 1988, Lincoln County, West Virginia, conducted by W.Va. Department of Energy.

Statement by: Lynn Ernest:

Hello, my name is Lynn Ernest and with all ^[deference] difference to people who like to work and hate having to drive out of the county, I say I hate to do it too, but I've been working for 15 years in Logan so that I can have a job to support myself as a farmer here in Lincoln County. That commute is three hours every day. I'm glad I have a chance to work to keep what I have. But to keep what I have, I do a lot of meticulous cultivation of the trees and the water and the ground takes a lot of hard work. I'm perhaps in love with the beauty, but most of all I'm in love with the quality of life and the quality of people in Lincoln County. The reason I no longer live in McDowell County, ^h where I grew up, is because it has been totally, and utterly destroyed. A responsible company called 'United States Steel' came in when I was a kid. My parents worked there so that they gives...so that they could give me an opportunity to overcome the conditions that that coal company placed upon the community. So I'm, so here I am in Lincoln County, fighting for a way of life that is not the way of the coal companies. Now, McDowell County is a ghost county. Ninety percent unemployment in Gary, they pulled out; they were not responsible to the community. Now they're trying to sell land and property for a nuclear waste dump. Did you know that's what happens to the land after it has become totally raped? There's no place in the nation they want to put it, so they put it in McDowell Coutny. Alright, pardon, [talking in

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background]...well I hope...I hope you get [laughs] a nuclear dump under your a [laughs] ...no, uhm, seriously, I'm here because of quality of people. They appreciate cultivation. You have to cultivate things that are worth while. They take time; you can't do it quickly. Everyone knows what the fast buck is all about, right? We don't want it. I'm a native West Virginian. My soul is in these mountains; my soul is in the water and I don't want anybody to mess with it. And I'm willing to run a chainsaw from six o'clock in the morning til...til it gets dark. 'Cause I like to see things slowly form. [talking in background] I want to read a statement I said to the daily. I live on Parker Street Road at Palamo. The project of this...excuse me...of this uh, proposed strip mine, Black Gold Coal Company of W.Va. will affect me in that it will affect the quality of life which I hold so dear. McDowell County, I left McDowell County originally to escape the industrial debris, the foul air, the coal trucks, the noise, the coal dust, the destroyed roads and the damage to the community water. Now we have no community water at all in McDowell Coutny. It's all seeped underground but also the strip mining allows it to run off quickly. I find it quite unpleasant to consider allowing a iindustrialist such as this company represents to come into this rural farming community where the quality of life and the quality of people are so fine. I regret what might happen to the air and water quality. And those things you think you might get...forget it. It's not going to be helped that money will go into someone else's pocket, you know, you're a West Virginian. You know the story; it's been around a long time. The second thing I find disarming is the negative effect that this project will have on our communities, help of developing touring, touring industry

around Mud River Dam, watershed project. I, like many others, have been waiting 15 to 30 years for this to happen. Things slowly working towards that. If we are to entertain the idea of offering rest spots from the surrounding cities and their industrialism, Logan, Madison, Charleston, we have to maintain and protect our rural beauty. Because believe it or not, what you got sells. I...I've seen it. It can happen but you got to sit tight and then you got to work hard. The jobs are coming; just wait a little longer; don't blow it. Most of us in this area have been waiting patiently and eagerly for the completion of this project and we just did find that it has been backed, it's going to happen. Don't let the people of the Black Gold Industry, of the fast bucks, come into our neighborhood and destroy years of work and meticulous planning and eliminate our hopes of developing a clean industry. D.O.E., you can help us with that. Finally, I want to...to just let you know one thing. When I was looking to come back to W. Va., and build a life I researched thoroughly W.Va. for a suitable living environment two years I looked, for a piece of property that could be cultivated and developed. I researched Lincoln Counties, possibilities among other counties of entering the coal industry. Because I knew what it was about I knew that it doesn't make promises, and doesn't pay off. I did not want to see here what happened in McDowell County, and as I researched Lincoln County's possibility of entering the coal industry, I had an Uncle (Harry Carday), geologist for the state and was in the '60's, who worked with WV geological surveys. He moved out all the coal, oil, and gas in WV long ago. He also told me and assured me; in the study that the uh, geological survey performed time again repeated there was such a low percentage of mineable coal in this county that

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Lincoln County would never, never prove to be a coal producing county. It would not even be a valuable economic move. It would be no way to pay it off to...what Exxon did, spending 30 million dollars at the edge of Wayne County, 30 million dollars.

Three-hundred jobs, those people were going to have, do you know where that company is now? The doors are closed. By the time they got it together, to put it out the market had shifted so much because nobody did marketing research, right? Didn't find out what people wanted. There was no market. U.S. Steel folded! Be aware of what is marketed. Know you have it, you're sitting on it, and...and watch it, because you may sell out before you find out what you have. Mr. is still an active planner in Charleston, still speaks and supports this lack of coal and a lack of this industry's liability in Lincoln County, It won't work; there's simply not enough coal to avoid this risk to Lincoln County's future. In the future, incidently, that probably all of your families, many of your families have been working on. So don't be fooled; keep your quality of life keeps the kind of people that this life attracts here. Your good type. Only know how good you where you'd have to see the other stuff, the ...the slander that goes on to humanity in a mining community. It does not collect the type of people your granddaddy wants to see you around even good companies have failed. Study your market potential and protect what you got; it's worth it.

COMPLETED

WEST VIRGINIA STRIP MINING

Public Hearing held by: WV Department of Energy

June 28, 1985

Logan, WV

Statement by: Lynn Ernest

MSO 463

anti-

WVSM-15

Black Gold Company Surface Mine Hearing, Inc., September 28, 1988, Lincoln County, West Virginia, conducted by W.Va. Department of Energy.

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